DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 250 106 PS 014 698

AUTHOR Cohn, Anne H.
TITLE It Shouldn't Hurt to Be a Child.
INSTITUTION National Committee for Prevention of Child Abuse, Chicago, Ill.
REPORT NO ISBN-0-937906-34-4
PUB DATE 82
NOTE 17p.
AVAILABLE FROM National Committee for Prevention of Child Abuse, 332 South Michigan Avenue, Suite 1250, Chicago, IL 60604.
PUB TYPE Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Child Abuse; *Intervention; Parent Education; *Prevention; Social Support Groups; Volunteers

ABSTRACT

This booklet provides basic information on child abuse and introduces the approach of the National Committee for Prevention of Child Abuse (NCPCA) to abuse prevention. Child abuse is defined and child abusers are characterized. Subsequently, various preventive programs are very briefly described. These include support programs for new parents; parent education; early and regular child and family screening and treatment; child care opportunities; programs for abused children and young adults; life skills training for children and young adults; self-help groups and other neighborhood supports; family support services; community organization activities; and public information and education on child abuse. In conclusion, ways concerned persons can help are described. These include seeking help for one's own child abuse problems; helping a friend, neighbor, or relative; reporting suspected abuse; volunteering time; and making a donation. A brief sketch of the activities of the NCPCA is also included. (RH)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

It shouldn't hurt to be a child.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

ED250106

PS 014698

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Helen Donovan

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

2

HELP THE NATIONAL COMMITTEE FOR PREVENTION OF CHILD ABUSE GET TO THE HEART OF THE PROBLEM

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS 3
INTRODUCTION 4
THE PROBLEM 5
What Is Child Abuse? 5
Who Are the Abusers? 6
SOLVING THE PROBLEM 7
HOW YOU CAN HELP 9
Start with Yourself 9
Help a Friend, Neighbor, or Relative 10
Report Suspected Abuse 10
Volunteer Your Time 12
Make a Donation 13
WHAT IS NCPCA? 14

© 1982. National Committee for Prevention of Child Abuse. All rights reserved.
No part of this booklet may be reproduced in any form without written permission from the publisher.

Third printing, 1984.

ISBN 0-937906-34-4

Printed in the United States of America.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Since 1976, the National Committee for Prevention of Child Abuse (NCPCA), in conjunction with the Advertising Council, Inc. and the Campbell-Ewald Advertising Company, has conducted national public awareness campaigns on the subject of child abuse. These campaigns consist of print ads that are distributed throughout the United States to newspapers, magazines, business journals and trade papers; public service messages that are sent to television and radio networks, including the Armed Forces Network; and posters for public transportation systems.

The purposes of the campaigns are to increase public awareness of child abuse and to motivate citizens to do something about the problem.

This year's national media campaign is being underwritten by a grant from W. Clement Stone, chairman of the board of Chicago-based Combined International. NCPCA extends its continuing gratitude to Mr. Stone for his generosity and deep concern for abused children and their families.

INTRODUCTION

The effects of child abuse are devastating. Each year one million American children suffer from child abuse. More than 2000 of these children die; for many of those who live, the hurts inflicted on them as children influence their entire lives. And ours.

Childhood histories of abuse and neglect are commonly reported by many adult criminals, juvenile delinquents, and teenage drug addicts and prostitutes. This means that your community, perhaps even your family may fall victim to violence and crime perpetrated by those who were once victims themselves—victims of physical abuse or neglect, of sexual abuse, of emotional maltreatment. The financial cost society bears to deal with the results of child abuse is enormous. The cost in human suffering and wasted individual potential is immeasurable.

Yet child abuse can be prevented. The National Committee for Prevention of Child Abuse knows how. And you can help.

This booklet provides basic information on child abuse and introduces NCPCA's approach for preventing abuse. With you and other concerned people getting to the heart of the problem, these proposals take on life.

Life—and death—is what it's all about. It shouldn't hurt to be a child.

THE PROBLEM

A million children—maybe more—are victims of abuse. Countless adults are trapped by their history into acts of social violence. That's one way to look at the problem. But there's another. Child abuse comes down to one child who is physically injured; one child who is deprived of what he or she needs to thrive; one child who is exploited for the sexual gratification of an adult; one child who is made to feel unloved, small, worthless, no good. And these ugly facts make up the elements of a definition.

WHAT IS CHILD ABUSE?

NCPCA defines child abuse as an injury or a pattern of injuries to a child that is nonaccidental. Child abuse includes nonaccidental physical injury, physical neglect, sexual abuse, and emotional abuse.

- Nonaccidental physical injury may include severe beatings, burns, human bites, strangulation, or immersion in scalding water with resultant bruises and welts, broken bones, scars, or serious internal injuries.
- Physical neglect is the withholding of or failure to provide a child with the basic necessities of life: food, clothing, shelter, medical care, attention to hygiene, or supervision needed for optimal physical growth and development.
- Sexual abuse is the exploitation of a child for the sexual gratification of an adult. It may range from exhibitionism and fondling to intercourse or use of a child in the production of pornographic materials.
- Emotional abuse includes excessive, aggressive, or unreasonable parental demands that place expectations on a child beyond his or her capabilities. Emotional abuse can show itself in constant and persistent teasing, belittling, or verbal attacks. Emotional abuses also include failures to provide the psychological nurturance necessary for a child's psychological growth and development—no love, no care, no support, no guidance.

Child abuse is not usually just one physical attack or just one instance of failure to meet a child's most basic needs. Usually child abuse is a pat-

tern of behavior. It takes place over a period of time, and its effects add up. The longer child abuse continues, the more serious it becomes, the more serious is the injury to the child, and the more difficult it is to stop.

WHO ARE THE ABUSERS?

Abusers are friends, neighbors, and relatives. It is a sad irony that many abusers genuinely love their children, but they find themselves caught in life situations beyond their control and they do not know how to cope. They are often isolated from friends and family and may have no one to give them emotional support. They may not like themselves and may not know how to get their emotional needs met. All abused children do not grow up to be abusive parents, but many do. Because abusive parenting is all they have known, they repeat it with their own children.

Abusers often perceive a child as being "different" or having special needs that set the child apart from other children. Perhaps the child was illegitimate, the result of an unplanned pregnancy, a difficult birth, or wanted for the wrong reasons—to resolve a parent's own problems, for example. Sometimes the child's mannerisms or behavior reminds the parent of his or her own childhood self or of another adult whom the parent now dislikes. Sometimes there are very real special needs that set the child apart from other children such as a physical handicap, mental retardation, or a chronic illness. Sometimes in a family of several children, just one will be singled out as a victim while the others lead relatively normal lives. In other cases, all the children will be abused.

Abusers tend to have unrealistic or inappropriate expectations of their children. They may set standards that are impossibly high. They may, for example, wrongly believe that children should always be quiet, or never make a mistake.

Child abuse does not belong solely in the domain of the poor. Abusers come from all economic, racial, ethnic, and religious groups. Money problems—especially the grinding money problems of the poor—do cause stress, however, and stress contributes to the potential for abuse. Other stresses, such as a shaky, fight-filled marriage, also contribute to abuse. But why some parents under stress abuse their children and others do not is a very complex issue that is not yet fully understood.

Whether it be one stressful circumstance or a number of crises that actually trigger abuse, it is clear that a combination of factors build so that a person simply cannot cope any longer.

Abused children are helpless. Unless you help.

SOLVING THE PROBLEM

Treating the victims of child abuse, restoring them to a wholesome, happy existence is vital. NCPCA believes the obvious—that it would be far better if an instance of child abuse had never occurred in the first place, and that therefore prevention is even more important than treating the problem after it occurs. *Prevention is*

a matter of saving lives. It will also save dollars. The effects of child abuse on children and on families are physically, mentally, and emotionally harmful and often long-lasting or permanent. Recovery chances get worse the longer the problem is allowed to persist.

Preventing child abuse does not require massive new programs. Existing resources can be used. In the long run, prevention activities can keep people out of an already overburdened and expensive social service system, a system that, if less burdened, could more effectively respond to its other cases. Prevention activities will help to keep children from growing up to be violent, institutionalized, or otherwise costly to society. Prevention will strengthen families, the core unit of society, and this in turn will improve the quality of life for later generations.

Child abuse is a community problem; NCPCA believes that abuse can only be prevented through activities at the community or local level. These activities must be designed to meet the special needs of the cultural, ethnic, religious, and economic groups in a given neighborhood or community. Because child abuse is such a complex problem, no one community activity is enough; a number of different strategies must be used.

The earlier support can be provided, the better. The more efficiently support can be provided, the better. For child abuse to be prevented, families need support at many times. NCPCA works for prevention programs, often volunteer-based, directed toward every phase of a person's life—community programs that address the underlying causes of abuse. Such prevention programs include:

- *Support programs for new parents*, such as perinatal bonding programs—to prepare people for the job of being a parent, to aid in the early development of a loving relationship and strong attachment between the new parent and the infant, and to promote family-centered birthing opportunities.

- *Education for parents*—to provide parents with information about child development and skills in child care as well as information about local social service and health resources helpful to new parents.

Early and regular child and family screening and treatment, such as that provided by home health visitors—to identify and deal with physical and developmental problems in children at an early age and to advise parents on well-child care.

Child care opportunities, such as day care centers, Head Start, neighborhood babysitting cooperatives, and crisis nurseries—to provide respite for parents and socialization opportunities for their children.

Programs for abused children and young adults through various professional and self-help approaches—to minimize the longer-term effects on children and young adults and to reduce the likelihood of their becoming abusive parents.

Life skills training for children and young adults through a variety of media including the dramatic arts—to equip young people with skills, knowledge, and experience necessary to cope with crises, to seek helping services, and to succeed in adulthood, particularly in the role of a parent.

Self-help groups and other neighborhood supports such as Parents Anonymous and individual support such as that provided by foster grandparents or parent aides—to reduce the social isolation so often associated with abuse, particularly for higher risk groups such as teenage parents.

Family support services, including crisis care such as hotline counseling and other emergency services, as well as longer-term support such as alcohol and drug counseling, nutrition counseling, and family planning—to provide families with what they need to cope with the stresses of life and to stay together, particularly for parents of children of any age with special needs, such as the handicapped child.

Community organization activities—to increase the availability of social service, health and educational resources, and other supports that reduce family stress.

Public information and education on child abuse prevention—to heighten the public's awareness of different types of abuse, to show the relationship between child abuse and many current social problems, and to provide specific information on preventing the problem.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

There are many ways in which you can help NCPCA prevent child abuse. You can:

- Start with yourself—reach out for help if you think you need it.
- Help a friend, neighbor, or relative.
- Report suspected abuse.
- Volunteer your time.
- Make a donation.

START WITH YOURSELF

You are not alone if you think you need help yourself. Being a parent isn't easy for anyone, and for some people it's very hard. If you answer "Yes" to several of the questions below, chances are you need some support and help.

- Do you feel troubled or nervous?
- Do you feel lonely and isolated with no one to turn to for help?
- Do you feel inadequate as a parent? Unable to cope?
- Are you often depressed?
- Do little problems seem overwhelming?
- Are you frightened about what you might do to your children?
- Do you sometimes physically hurt your children when you're angry with yourself?
- Do you feel that you were mistreated as a child and are now repeating your past?
- Do you feel confused concerning your sexual feelings toward your children?

There are other people who feel as you do and there are people who can help you to cope with your life and family relationships. Take the first step: reach out for help. Many communities have child abuse hot lines or crisis referral lines. You don't have to identify yourself. Some communities have crisis nurseries where you can drop your child off for a short period of time until the crisis passes. Most communities have parents' groups. NCPCA works closely with Parents Anonymous, a national organization with more than a thousand chapters around the country. Parents Anonymous groups are composed of individuals who have the same kind of problem you may have decided you have. They can help. To find out

which group is closest to you, you can call toll free (800) 421-0353; California residents call 1-800-352-0386. You don't need to give your name. Or you can write: Parents Anonymous (P.A.), 22330 Hawthorne Boulevard, Suite 208, Torrance, California 90505.

You might also consider contacting your local mental health center or family service agency. A family doctor or local health clinic may also be able to help you find the best resource. But help will not come to you magically if you sit still. You must take the first step.

HELP A FRIEND, NEIGHBOR, OR RELATIVE

You can do a lot to help those you care about cope with the problems that lead to child abuse. There are many ways to assist families—be they friends, neighbors, or relatives who are having child abuse related difficulties. Sometimes just being a friend, helping out with household chores, taking care of the children for a while, being around to listen to a person talk about his or her problems can help some troubled parents cope with the isolation and stresses that trigger abuse. Helping a parent find help elsewhere, at a local counseling center or through a parent education program, can be a great assistance in preventing child abuse. Being a friend to children in a family under stress can also be very helpful for all.

REPORT SUSPECTED ABUSE

You may not be in a position to reach out to a family. You may suspect that a child is being abused, but for many good reasons you may not want to get directly involved. In such cases, you can help a friend, neighbor, or relative

by reporting the suspected case of child abuse to the child protection services in your area.

Child abuse is governed by state law. Every state in America has a law against abusing any child, though the legal definitions of what constitutes child abuse may differ from state to state. NCPCA does not have any legal power or jurisdiction over suspected cases of child abuse. Each state law designates at least one statewide agency that is required by the law to receive and investigate reports of child abuse. This agency is usually called the Department of Social Services or Children and Family Services. (Your state reporting number may be listed in the front of your telephone book.) Because your state law designates an agency as the one responsible for child abuse and neglect matters, reports of suspected cases of abuse and neglect must be made and must continue to be made to the agency in the state *where the child lives.*

For a clearer understanding of your state's child abuse and neglect laws,

you should be able to obtain a copy from the agency or from the district attorney's office. Ideally the goals of the reporting process are to:

- Identify the child in peril.
- Guard the child's immediate physical safety.
- Determine if abuse or neglect is present.
- Stop abuse and neglect.
- Offer appropriate treatment.
- Strengthen the family whenever possible.

While certain individuals are required to make reports of suspected child abuse, any person may make such a report. Reporting suspected cases of child abuse can protect a child and help a family. It may save a life. There is no simple rule to determine if a particular instance should be reported. Any person who knows or suspects that a child has been abused should contact the local office of the appropriate state agency. Don't wait until you can prove that abuse is occurring; you will not get in trouble with the authorities if you are wrong. *Persons who report in good faith are granted immunity from civil and criminal action even if the report proves to be mistaken.* You do not need to identify yourself when you report, although the credibility of your report will be stronger if you do.

Once a report of suspected child abuse is received, the appropriate agency makes an investigation to determine whether the child is in immediate danger and whether he or she has been abused.

If the child's life or health is immediately threatened, the child may be removed from the home by court order. Whether or not the child is removed, if the investigation shows that abuse has occurred, a treatment program should be offered to strengthen the family and avert future abuse. If a family receives the right kind of treatment and support, the members may learn to cope with stress and to care for their children.

Help will not come to your friends, relatives, and neighbors magically, either. Help them get help for themselves and their children.

VOLUNTEER YOUR TIME

Child abuse is a community problem and prevention measures must take place at the community level. Concerned citizens who wish to volunteer their time to help develop and operate local prevention programs are needed in every community in this country. Hospitals, schools, neighborhood centers, day care programs, nursery schools, and well-baby programs all can use help in strengthening those activities of theirs that contribute to the prevention of child abuse. Regardless of your skills and experience, there is some way in which you can help. The challenge is to figure out what the best way would be for you to volunteer your time.

Do you want to help care for children? Do you want to be part of a speakers bureau? Do you want to assist with office duties? Are you an advocate? Are you a group organizer? Is fund raising interesting to you or would you like to help in the service end of a program such as support programs for new parents? Do you want to help develop a network of concerned citizens? Do you want to have your club or group begin a prevention program? It's sometimes hard to find the answers to all these questions right away, but these are very important ways in which you can volunteer your time to prevent child abuse.

Because NCPCA is dedicated to involving concerned citizens in actions to prevent child abuse, it is work-

Child abuse hurts everybody.

ing to develop volunteer-based prevention organizations in every state. NCPCA now has chapters or networks of concerned citizens in states across the country, including: Alaska, California, Connecticut, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky,

Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Oregon, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Virginia, Washington, and Wisconsin. These chapters are working to implement prevention programs, foster public awareness of the problem, provide education, furnish training, and serve as a focal point for child abuse prevention efforts in their state. They can use your help.

To work with the National Committee for Prevention of Child Abuse as a volunteer, contact: NCPCA, Chapter Development, 332 South Michigan Avenue, Suite 1250, Chicago, Illinois 60604-4357, (312) 663-3520.

MAKE A DONATION

You may want to help prevent child abuse but may not have the time to volunteer. Making a financial donation is another equally important way in which you can help. Even volunteer-based organizations such as NCPCA require financial resources. NCPCA encourages you to make a donation to an organization committed to preventing child abuse. New programs are needed; existing programs can be linked together, while guarding against duplication of effort. But resources are scarce. No one person, no one organization can do it alone. Each community must solve this devastating problem through the combined efforts of everyone in the community. Your support will help greatly. If making a donation is what you choose to do, you could start by supporting NCPCA. In doing this, you would be joining a national effort to prevent child abuse. Contributions and bequests to NCPCA are charitable contributions that are deductible to the extent permitted by law.

WHAT IS NCPCA?

NCPCA is a publicly supported, volunteer-based, nonprofit organization whose mission is to prevent child abuse. NCPCA is a network of thousands of individuals from the corporate, civic, lay, and professional communities working together to create awareness of the problem, to learn how best to prevent the problem, and to develop effective prevention programs.

NCPCA conducts a nationwide public awareness campaign; publishes monographs, booklets, and pamphlets; furnishes technical assistance and consultative services; sponsors workshops, seminars, and conferences; provides training for professionals, paraprofessionals, and volunteers; acts as a clearinghouse for information on child abuse prevention; serves as an active advocate for children, families, and child abuse prevention; develops model prevention programs; provides services such as parent education to families; conducts research to improve knowledge about prevention; and is currently assuming the leading role in a national coalition of organizations concerned with child abuse.

YES! I agree that it shouldn't hurt to be a child and I want to help the National Committee for Prevention of Child Abuse get to the heart of the problem. Enclosed is my donation for: $_____.

NAME _____

STREET ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP CODE _____

Mail to: NCPCA
332 South Michigan Avenue, Suite 1250
Chicago, Illinois 60604-4357

I WOULD ALSO LIKE ONE FREE COPY OF:

- ☐ The NCPCA catalog that describes educational publications and gives price and ordering information.
- ☐ The most recent NCPCA Annual Report.
- ☐ The most recent annual audit.

16

NATIONAL COMMITTEE FOR PREVENTION OF CHILD ABUSE

National Committee for Prevention of Child Abuse (NCPCA) was established in 1972 in response to the increasing incidence of infant deaths due to purposely inflicted injury.

NCPCA was formed to help prevent child abuse before it occurs and is dedicated to involving concerned citizens in actions to prevent child abuse.

NCPCA defines child abuse to include nonaccidental physical injury, emotional abuse, neglect, sexual abuse, and exploitation of children.

NCPCA's goals are:

- To stimulate greater public awareness of and education about the specific ways in which child abuse can be prevented.
- To advocate for public and private sector policies and programs aimed at preventing child abuse.
- To develop, strengthen, and expand state and local child abuse prevention activities.
- To encourage research and strategies, the dissemination of resulting findings, and the generation of new ideas and innovations.
- To strengthen relationships among organizations working to prevent child abuse.

It Shouldn't Hurt to Be a Child was written by Anne H. Cohn, D.P.H., executive director of NCPCA.